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ABSTRACT

Since children who have not acquired proficiency in spoken language are handicapped in school, the development of instructional programs which provide for the systematic acquisition of the skills of oral communication is necessary at all levels. Helping children learn to express and understand ideas, to attain self-realization, to improve social adjustment, and to participate in group action are essential educational objectives for (1) the pre-school, where children often need direct, positive instruction in the basic skills of listening and speaking, (2) the elementary school, where children learn to apply the tools of thinking, speaking, and learning, and (3) the secondary school, where more specialized training in speech is offered. Improvement in the quality and type of instuction of oral communications calls for a reexamination of teacher training practices, personnel placement policies, inservice and institute programs, and curriculum and research projects. (JM)

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SPEECH EDUCATION IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

EDITOR'S NOTE: *The statement which follows has, through action of the Administrative Council, been adopted as an official SAA document. The initial draft of the statement was prepared by an Ad Hoc Committee of the Association at a meeting held in Bloomington, Indiana, April 24-26, 1965. The members of the Committee were: Evelyn Konigsberg, Adelphi University, Chairman; Henrietta L. Cortright, Seaholm High School, Birmingham, Michigan; Freda Kenner, Messick High School, Memphis, Tennessee; Ernest Pech, Denver Public Schools; Karl F. Robinson, California State College at Hayward.*

One of the pressing needs of our time is for persons skilled as communicators. The amazing growth of technical knowledge, together with developments in the mass media, the removal of social and political barriers, and advances in production methods places a high premium upon the ability to express ideas clearly and to understand them readily. Solitary workers and those employed in tasks which formerly required little use of the communication skills now must give and receive complex directions as part of their daily activities. The increased mobility of the American people and the upward thrust of the underprivileged call upon countless thousands to adjust themselves to new communities, customs, and living conditions. Sociologists suggest that a person's place within the economic structure is determined in large part by his communicative skills; psychologists have shown that such skills are essential to personal adjustment and psychic well-being.

Speaking and listening are the principal means through which people communicate with one another, through which they clarify concepts, test assertions, and achieve commonality of experience and feeling. The man who cannot express his needs or convictions orally is isolated from his fellows; he is a lonely and frightened figure in our verbal society.

The need to develop oral communication skills is more widely recognized than acted upon. In his book, *The Mature Mind,* Harry Overstreet writes: "In no area of our maturing is arrested development more common than in the area of communication. It is so common that it is not even noticed; it is taken for granted as natural. The person who is mature in his communicative powers is noted as an exception to the rule. The person who is immature—halting, clumsy, obscure, rambling, dull, platitudinous, insensitive—is the rule." For years the skills of oral communication have been neglected, or have been taught only incidentally or sporadically in most of our elementary and secondary schools.

Learning to speak one's own language well should be a basic goal of education. Because the child learns to speak and to listen before he enters school, and because of the great variety of homes in which such learning occurs, the communicative ability which children bring with them to school varies widely. Yet a certain level of this ability is essential before a child is educable. The child who has not acquired proficiency in spoken language usually is handicapped in learning to read, and therefore has difficulty in most learning situations. (See "Children and Oral Language," *Elementary English,* November 1963, Joint Committee of ACEI, ASCD, IRA, and NCTE.)

Unsystematic acquisition of the skills of oral communication cannot meet the

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child's needs. Organized instruction in speaking and listening, in verbalizing ideas and attitudes, is a major responsibility of the schools. Besides enhancing the student's ability to express and to understand ideas, such instruction contributes to the broader goals of self-realization, social adjustment, and effective participation in group action.

Too often, instruction in pre-school or kindergarten, as well as in the elementary grades, is left to the regular classroom teacher who, despite her interest in the child, is not adequately prepared to teach the oral communication skills. As a result, many students fail to achieve the intellectual, social, and emotional adjustment which is requisite to satisfactory educational development. It is common knowledge that many high school graduates cannot present themselves effectively in a simple conversation or in a job interview. Many more are unable to think clearly or to organize ideas properly when confronted with more difficult speaking situations. Even able and gifted students sometimes lack the ability to speak correctly, cogently, and fluently. Immediate steps must be taken to upgrade or, where necessary, to initiate sound instruction in the skills of oral communication for *all* students at *all* educational levels.

The Needs of the Student

Certain of the goals of speech instruction are shared with other types of instruction, most notably training in written composition. Among these are:

1. The ability to analyze ideas.
2. The ability to analyze audiences.
3. The ability to find evidence and arguments.
4. The ability to organize ideas clearly and cogently.

It is, however, a mistake to assume that because oral and written communication involve similar problems and aim in part at similar goals, training in one mode of communication will automatically improve performance in the other. Current research on the relation between speaking and writing skills raises serious questions concerning this assumption.

This is not to say that all instruction in oral communication is or should be carried on in a course in speech, or that all instruction in written communication is or should be confined to a course in composition. This is, however, to say that the only way to insure adequate attention to all important aspects of speech development is to give each student an opportunity for concentrated work in oral skills under the guidance of a teacher who is well trained in this mode of communication.

In addition to the goals which it shares with instruction in composition and with education as a whole, training in speech aims at the following ends:

1. The ability to *locate evidence* and to *develop arguments* for use in situations in which communication is to be oral.
   The student must learn the many ways in which arguments and appeals suitable for oral discourse differ from those used when writing.
2. The ability to adapt language and ideas to a wide variety of speaking situations and to a wide range of audiences.
   a. Speaking situations vary from informal conversation to formal reporting or speechmaking.
   b. Audiences vary from one's family or close friends to a teacher or principal to be addressed or a public to be informed or persuaded.
3. Sensitivity to other persons as senders and receivers of oral messages.
   a. Sensitivity to other persons as receivers involves adjusting a message to the verbal and visual responses which are made as one speaks.
   b. Sensitivity to other persons as senders involves adjusting one's listening set to the ever-changing verbal and visual cues which come from other members of the audience as well as from the speaker himself.

4. The development of those skills of vocal and bodily expression by means of which the good oral communicator conveys ideas and attitudes accurately and fully.
   a. These skills include acceptable pronunciation, clear articulation, pleasing voice quality, and a bodily responsiveness which aids in communicating the idea or feeling expressed.

The Program and the Teacher

Pre-School. Teachers working with pre-school children should understand how the learning process develops and should recognize the part that oral communication plays in this development. From his earliest years language is the vehicle by which the child thinks, and it remains so throughout his life. Jean Piaget says: "It is on the verbal plane that the child makes the chief effort of adaptation to adult thought and to the acquisition of logical habits." The child becomes acquainted with his environment through language and verbalization as well as through direct experience. In later life his habits of language usage condition the way in which he views and interprets the world about him.

Children from disadvantaged homes must be provided with an opportunity to succeed in their school work. One of the reasons they often do not succeed is that they have had inadequate or negative experiences with oral communication. Directed, positive experiences in listening and speaking should begin with these children by the age of three if they are to take their places in the regular school program. If basic habits of listening and speaking are acquired at this early age, they later can be extended so as to assist the pupil to learn at all levels. All teachers of preschool children, but especially teachers of the disadvantaged, should be model oral communicators, free of speech problems or frustrations themselves and able to prevent such problems from developing in the children with whom they work.

At an early age children should be encouraged to talk about their experiences and feelings—to verbalize them both for the sake of self-conceptualization and in order to learn how to convey them clearly and faithfully to others. Their attempts at such communication should be constantly reinforced.

Children also should be encouraged to ask questions, and, through further questioning on the part of the teacher, to seek out answers. The teacher must provide the means by which the child can satisfy his curiosity. She should talk with—not at—her pupils. She should be a good listener and should motivate each child to listen attentively when others speak. Children learn much from one another. The teacher should be aware of this fact and should take full advantage of it in planning and conducting lessons. In this way she will be able to make maximum use of the children's contributions to the learning process.

Grades K-6. In grades K-6 the program of speech education should continue the development of the pupil's skills in using oral communication as one of his essential tools of thinking and learning. Because speech patterns are more often caught than taught, the teacher's own speech should serve as a suitable model for imitation. In these grades pupils should begin to learn to apply speech skills more deliberately in order to achieve a desired listener response. The classroom teacher must be prepared to provide direct instruction as well as to suggest various sorts of activities in which the pupils' developing skills may be applied.

Secondary School. In the secondary school, instruction in oral communication should be carried on by teachers who have had broader and more intensive preparation in the forms of speech

activity and in the techniques of teaching speech. Activities and exercises of increasing difficulty and complexity must provide scope for further development of pupils' skills. Provision should be made for pupils to learn about socially accepted forms of procedure and to participate in a variety of speech activities. (See below.)

Basic Preparation of Teachers. All teachers charged with the task of developing pupils' competence in oral communication need preparation in the following:

1. Knowledge of how the child develops thought processes, language, and speech.
2. Knowledge of the basic linguistic and phonetic structures of American English.
3. Knowledge of the forms of oral communication: conversation, creative dramatics, choral speaking, discussion and debate, improvisation, interviewing, oral interpretation, oral reporting, public speaking, story telling, and dramatic production.
4. Personal proficiency in oral and written communication.
5. Skill in motivating and guiding pupils to develop correct and effective habits of oral communication.
6. Training in the skills and special methods of teaching oral communication and in evaluating the results obtained.

Recommendations

To initiate measures for the improvement of instruction in oral communication in the schools, the following are recommended:

A. *Training of Teachers*

1. Institutes (set up as rapidly as possible) to train teachers in pre-school and grades K-6 in the special knowledge and skills of teaching oral communication.
   a. At this stage in the development of methods for teaching the oral communication skills to children, each teacher must also be a researcher.
   b. A special effort should be made to locate such institutes in areas where there is a large concentration of culturally disadvantaged pupils.
2. Institutes for secondary school teachers assigned to the teaching of speech.
   a. For teachers who have had no academic training in speech.
   b. For teachers who have had only minimal or inadequate training in speech.
   c. For teachers certified in speech who are in need of refresher and upgrading experiences.
3. Institutes in which institutions of higher learning and the public schools cooperate to provide laboratory summer classes to demonstrate master teaching of speech.
4. In-service short course workshops in speech education for teachers in the preschool, elementary, and secondary grades.

B. *Re-assignment of personnel in schools and school systems*

1. Use of specialists in speech (supervisors and master teachers) to assist in training classroom teachers and to do demonstration teaching in speech in the primary and intermediate grades.
2. Assignment of more speech certified teachers to junior and senior high schools.
3. Organization of teams of specialists as traveling units for demonstration teaching and for conducting workshops. Selection of personnel, methods, and materials should be made in consultation with SAA, with certified supervisors of speech in a public school system, or with a nearby college or university which conducts a graduate program in speech education.

C. *Curriculum and research*

1. Preparation of a comprehensive bibliography of current trends, studies, and practices in the teaching of speech.
2. Evaluative survey of curriculum guides, textbooks, teaching materials, and professional journals.
3. Survey of the preparation and standards of certification of teachers assigned to teach speech.
4. Evaluative survey of curricula and courses of study in speech. Preparation of suggested curriculum bulletins.
5. Studies of the effectiveness of various aspects of speech education as they now exist.
6. Provision for continuing study of the relationship of language and speech development to learning.